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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002377

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [KPAL](#) [PHUM](#) [UNHCR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: UNHCR IRAQ HEAD OF DELEGATION ENGAGES GOI
OFFICIALS ON MAKHMOUR, PALESTINIANS

REF: BAGHDAD 2286 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR MARGARET SCOBAY, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B)
AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: New UNHCR-Iraq Head of Delegation Janvier de Riedmatten made his initial calls on GOI MOI, MFA, and MODM on July 1 and 2. He advised RefCoord and PolOff that although the GOI Ministries gave positive signals on willingness to help on Makhmour, they did not offer specifics. UNHCR may need USG help to convince the KRG to agree to let legitimate refugees from Makhmour who are not able to repatriate to Turkey integrate into Kurdistan. De Riedmatten will return later to meet with KRG officials on Makhmour. De Riedmatten believes that it would be politically difficult for the GOI to do much for the Palestinians at present given strong anti-Palestinian sentiment on the Iraqi street. MFA informed De Riedmatten that the GOI has formed committees to study the possibility of accession to the Conventions on Refugees and Statelessness. De Riedmatten confirmed that new MODM Minister Sultan plans to visit Amman July 7 for consultations organized by UNHCR-Iraq. Also, the GOI Permanent Committee on Refugees will visit Iraq for consultations starting July 31.

Makhmour

¶2. (C) De Riedmatten passed copies of High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres' letter to President Talabani (delivered the previous week) on Makhmour to Minister of Interior Jawad Boulani, Minister of Displacement and Migration Abd al-Samad Sultan, and Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammed al-Hajj Mahmoud (Minister of Foreign Affairs Hoshyar Zebari is abroad). (NOTE: full text of the letter forwarded to PRM.) In all three meetings, the GOI officials spoke in general terms in support of resolving Makhmour, but did not provide specifics. De Riedmatten attributed the lack of specificity to the delay in delivery of the Guterres letter, the short time Ministers Boulani and Sultan have held their offices, and the absence of Minister Zebari. He plans a follow-on trip to meet with Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) officials to discuss Makhmour in the near future (date TBD). UNHCR has already been in contact with KRG officials, including UN liaison Dindar Zebari, who have traveled to

Amman to discuss refugee matters, but has not yet met with senior KRG leadership. KRG officials so far have been skeptical about local integration in Kurdistan for Makhmour residents who cannot repatriate to Turkey. EmbOffs raised with de Riedmatten recent reports that the GOI has officially transferred Makhmour to KRG authority. EmbOffs and de Riedmatten agreed this transfer would minimize the role of MODM in resolution of Makhmour, since the KRG has it's own refugee officials and does not allow MODM to maintain offices in Kurdistan.

Palestinians

¶3. (C) Minister Boulani, Minister Sultan, and Acting Minister Mahmoud all told De Riedmatten that GOI policy is to protect the Palestinians and ensure they are living in the best possible conditions. Boulani indicated that MOI has been holding inter-ministerial meetings this week to discuss what can be done to address Palestinian security issues. However, the ministers emphasized that GOI resources are insufficient to protect the Iraqi people, and that it would be problematic to do more for Palestinians than for Iraqis. The ministers also made reference to insurgent activities and terrorism, noting that Zargawi was of Palestinian origin. They indicated that it would be politically difficult for the GOI to take action because of the strong anti-Palestinian sentiment prevalent on the Iraqi street which intensifies whenever there is an upsurge of terrorist violence in Baghdad.

¶4. (C) With regard to residency permits for the Palestinians, De Riedmatten got mixed signals. On July 1, Minister Boulani

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instructed his subordinates to arrange a meeting for him with the PLO chief of mission. However a July 2 meeting with Major General Yasseen al-Yassiri, Director of MOI's Nationality and Travel directorate, left de Riedmatten with the impression that a prompt solution is unlikely. MG Yassiri initially insisted that there was no problem with Palestinian residence permits, but when De Riedmatten told him that not only the Palestinians themselves but also UNAMI officers and various Embassies in Baghdad have raised the issue with UNHCR repeatedly, Yassiri said that one-year residence permits are available for Palestinians but the Minister of Interior has to personally approve each one, which creates a bottle neck. Yassiri reportedly changed his story again later in the same meeting, saying that the problem was that MODM had never provided MOI with a complete list of all the Palestinian refugees. Yassiri said that he, rather than Minister Boulani, would meet with the PLO chief of mission and a representative group of 25 Palestinians who are having residency permit problems. (Note: In Embassy meetings with Yassiri, he has told us that Palestinians as refugees are not allowed residency permits, but that instead his office "kindly" provides letters to ensure that they are not harassed by police. End Note)

Accession to Conventions on Refugees and Statelessness

¶5. (C) Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Mahmoud told De Riedmatten that the MFA has set up committees to study the possibility of accession to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocol and the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. De Riedmatten indicated that this was a first step in what will no doubt be a lengthy process.

Consultations for GOI Officials in Amman

¶6. (C) De Riedmatten told PolOff UNHCR is organizing a three-day program in Amman for Minister Sultan starting July
¶7. They will discuss substantive matters as well as MODM

capacity building. UNHCR has invited KRG officials to Amman to participate in the program and hopes to encourage greater KRG and MODM cooperation. They will also discuss revision of the draft Basic Law for MODM. Minister Sultan admitted the need to bring up the need to revise the draft Basic Law for MODM and specifically mentioned the need to ensure that all populations of concern are included. (NOTE: The previous minister's edits, in UNHCR's opinion, weakened protections in the law for Iraq's populations of concern. De Riedmatten gave Sultan a copy of the UNCHR-preferred original draft, as developed under the PRM-supported capacity building program.)

17. (C) UNHCR is also organizing a three-day workshop in Amman for the members of the GOI Permanent Committee on Refugees (mostly MOI working-level employees, with a few representatives from other Ministries including MODM) starting July 31.

18. (C) COMMENT: KRG resistance to local integration for Makhmour residents is a sticking point that UNHCR may need USG help in resolving. The GOI response on Palestinians is more worrisome. The changing stories as to what the problem is with regard to Palestinian residency permits raise some questions about GOI actual willingness to be helpful on this issue. This is the first the Embassy has heard about a possible one-year residency permit, and it would constitute a departure from Yassiri's posture in previous meetings.
SATTERFIELD